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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [BA](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#)

SUBJECT: PDAS CHENEY DISCUSSES COUNTERTERRORISM AND
DEMOCRACY ISSUES WITH INTERIOR MINISTER

Classified By: AMBASSADOR WILLIAM T. MONROE FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d)

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SUMMARY
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1. (S) NEA PDAS Elizabeth Cheney, accompanied by DAS Scott Carpenter, Ambassador Monroe, and the RSO, met with Interior Minister Shaikh Rashid Al-Khalifa and Bahrain National Security Agency (BNSA) Undersecretary Shaikh Khalifa May 10 to discuss counterterrorism concerns and democratic initiatives. The Minister discussed at length the recent Shia demonstrations in Bahrain, saying that Bahrain in principle supports freedom of expression (it approved 148 demonstrations over the last 10 months), but had a problem with the timing of the Sitra march, coming right before the Formula 1 race when police resources were already stretched. He praised the behavior of both the demonstrators and the police during the May 6 demonstration, noting that the trend seemed to be going down in terms of numbers of demonstrators. On counterterrorism, Shaikh Rashid said that he will meet with parliamentary blocks to develop consensus on a much-needed new counterterrorism law; stated that progress continues on setting up a Joint Counterterrorism Center; and said that surveillance continues on the four terror suspects while their case awaits a Constitutional court decision.

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DEMONSTRATIONS AND CIVIL RIGHTS
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2. (C) PDAS Cheney opened the meeting by noting the Department had watched with interest the Bahrain Government's handling of recent Shia demonstrations, and asked Shaikh Rashid for his perspective. Shaikh Rashid stated that the Ministry has approved permits for 148 demonstrations in the last 10 months. The government supports freedom of expression, but within limits. "We are living in a new era of reform," he said, "and trying to cope with it." The values of democracy are important. People must realize that the government is honest and transparent. For its part, the Ministry is training a corps of Shia men and women officers (they graduate in four months) to provide community policing in Shia areas throughout the country. The purpose is to give the communities a competent and integrated police force to gain the confidence of the people. More broadly, he added, Shias and Sunnis must work together. The country's economy can only be built with the participation of all Bahrainis -- both Sunni and Shia.

3. (C) PDAS Cheney asked why a permit was denied for the Shia demonstration planned for Sitra in March. The Minister said that the major concern was the timing, as the march was planned just before the Formula 1 race. Lots of people were coming from abroad for the race, and police ranks were stretched thin in preparation for the race and could not be diverted to secure such a large demonstration. The demonstration, if not peaceful, would have hurt Bahrain's image and future economic development. The Ambassador, noting that a second demonstration had been permitted to take place on May 6, asked where the Minister thought the demonstrations were leading. Shaikh Rashid, pulling out an aerial photograph to show a smaller crowd than the media reported, said that the trend is down in terms of demonstration participants. The Ministry supports the peoples' right to demonstrate if they follow procedures and maintain order. The demonstrators did follow the rules on May 6, and the demonstration proceeded smoothly. Shaikh Rashid stated that he was proud of the way the police handled themselves on May 6. They are educating themselves, and trying to act as a new police force. He added that the May 6 demonstration organizers thanked him for the excellent police work.

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COUNTERTERRORISM
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4. (C) Turning to the issue of counterterrorism, PDAS Cheney

asked about security situation in Bahrain. Shaikh Rashid replied that the Ministry is building layers of security to protect the country, developing a system that depends on coordinated cooperation on counterterrorism issues. Bahrain signed some of the United Nations counterterrorism agreements and will sign all of them. He said that Bahrain needs a new counterterrorism law, as existing law does not identify specific crimes as terrorism. There are some misunderstandings about this law in the parliament, he said, but he has met, and will continue to meet, with the heads of parliamentary blocks to build consensus to pass the law. The effort to establish a Joint Counterterrorism Center (JCTC) is progressing well, he said. Standard Operating Procedures have been written and the other participating Bahraini government agencies are cooperating. The Minister wants to move faster in setting up the JCTC, and greatly appreciated the contributions from the Embassy and FBI team that visited Bahrain in March. Bahrain proposed to GCC members at the GCC security meeting held Riyadh last February to establish similar JCTCs throughout the region based on its model. PDAS Cheney offered further support and assistance in setting up the JCTC.

15. (S) PDAS Cheney asked about the status of the four Bahraini extremists currently under surveillance while their case proceeds through the courts. Shaikh Rashid advised the case was now before the Constitutional Court. Yasser Kamal and other three extremists are aware of BNSA surveillance and have complained publicly about it. Shaikh Rashid is not happy with the Attorney General's staff and its ability to conduct investigations, which he believes may have weakened the court case. He said "we have assigned one of our best officers" to the Attorney General's office to upgrade its capabilities..

16. (C) Shaikh Rashid expressed appreciation for the Anti-terrorism Assistance (ATA) courses provided by the State Department. He noted the recent VIP Protection training and Explosive Detector Dog/Handler course, graduates of which were used to sweep her hotel before arrival.

17. (S) Shaikh Rashid stated that a U.S. Coast Guard tam was in Bahrain this week to conduct a needs assessment for the Bahrain Coast Guard. He noted the need to build an effective and integrated Coast Guard in Bahrain and throughout the GCC.

18. (U) PDAS Cheney cleared this cable.
MONROE